Community Engagement: The Vision Ahead

Wendy Watson: Welcome, everyone. I am really excited to welcome you to our webinar on Community Engagement: The Vision Ahead. We are really fortunate to have a great 90 minutes planned where we're going to work together and discuss community engagement. So, when we're looking at community engagement, which we know is a really important part of our work with families and children and making progress toward child and family outcomes, we often think about, kind of, the big picture community engagement.

I'm really excited in this webinar that we're going to do some unpacking of the topic and really looking a little bit deeper about some of the strategies, and the techniques, and the tools that have been used – and you can use, too – to support authentic effective community engagement. It really provides us, as we look at this, some ideas about how to engage in our communities, to network, to share expertise, to effectively use resources, and most importantly, make progress toward outcomes. So, real quick, if you haven't downloaded the handout, now would be a great time to do that. We'll be using this handout throughout the webinar. I want to encourage everybody to have a copy of that handy, have a pen or a pencil available, so that you can jot down good ideas and notes, as we move through our agenda.

So, with me today from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement is Mindy May. She's a program manager and national trainer. She will be guiding us in really thinking about some of the tools and strategies that we can use. And then myself – I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Wendy Watson. I will be our moderator. And I am a consultant with the National Center. So, I'll be helping us move through our agenda and hold the conversation – keep us going. So, during today's webinar we have three objectives that we'll focus on. We're going to really be thinking about the importance of having a shared vision when you engage with community partners, and how do you actually come to a shared vision and support and sustain that over time.

We'll be thinking about collaborative planning, the role of planning and collaboration, and how very important it is to be very strategic and thoughtful and intentional-- when we engage with community partners. And then we'll be taking a look, as I said before, at the tools, the strategies, and the practices that we can use to support our community engagement work, increase the effectiveness, and build those positive goal-oriented relationships that move us toward progress on outcomes. So, our agenda today – we'll be hearing about the impacts from one community's work. So, we do have a panel of three guest presenters that will be talking about their work together in engaging the community.

We'll be reviewing the importance of goals and strategies in measuring progress or impact in community engagement work. We'll explore the strength-based attitudes and relationship-based practices that can support this work and guide some very specific strategies we can use. We'll learn about those strategies and how they've been used to navigate some of the challenges that come up in community engagement work. And then we're going to think

together about the next step. So, given our conversation today, by the end of the webinar, we will all have a chance to identify some next steps that we want to take and share those at the end via a chat session. And so with that, let's begin with hearing about the impact of one community's work in community engagement.

And joining me today is three wonderful women who have been working together for almost over years, I believe, in their community as partners to make progress toward outcomes and really support families and young children in their area. So, joining me, I want to introduce Bev Thurber.

Bev Thurber: Hi, I'm Bev. I'm the executive director of the Early Childhood Council of Larimer County. We are a nonprofit that supports community collaboration especially around early childhood issues.

Wendy: And then sitting right next to Bev – we're all sitting around a table here with you today – is Corinne VanDyke.

Corinne VanDyke: Good afternoon, I'm Corinne VanDyke. I'm with Poudre School District's Early Childhood Education Program here in Fort Collins, Colorado. We have an Early Head Start where we serve prenatal moms through three years olds and children three years old. And we have a Head Start in which we have children. We also have other funding sources which-- total children enrolled in our early childhood program is over a thousand.

Wendy: And then I also want to introduce you to Jane Everett.

Jane Everett: Hello. This is Jane. I work for the Thompson School District in the Integrated Early Childhood Program. We have Head Start children and, like Corinne's program, we also have other funded preschool programs, so that our total number of children enrolled is right now a little over 600.

Wendy: That's great. So, I'm really excited to have these three amazing people to join us today. They have been doing a lot of work. And so I've asked them to share some thoughts about the results of their work. So, what have been some of their successes that they've had in their community engagement work.

Bev: So, to give a little bit of background, before we get into our actual work, I want to share that we were just a group of people in the community that came together in the late 1990s. There was no organization behind it. It was just a group of people that said, "Look, we have a shared vision that we want to improve and better coordinate services for children and families across our community." And we focused across all four domains that you see on the screen there. Over time, it evolved. This sort of group evolved into a freestanding, nonprofit organization that had a mission to provide background support for partners to come together and jointly identify challenges and solutions. And although the council is a major convener of all

the community partners that we have, we don't always take the lead. Different community partners take turns at providing leadership.

Part of what has helped to support this community approach is – is that we've really had a shared vision, a common message, and a common approach to our work. But it's important to sort of say we came together because we had a common commitment and a common vision to make things better for children and families through the community. But, we actually didn't have a written vision statement. People often think you got to have a vision statement first and we didn't. I mean we...

Jane: We were just kindred spirits.

Bev: We were. We were. And we... I think we always made sure that we kept the needs of children and families front and center and have that common commitment to figuring out, "How do we do it all better?"

Corinne: And so I think one of those examples of having a common commitment was our Early Head Start program here in Poudre School District. We initially... when the RFP came out for Early Head Start, Poudre School District applied several times with no success for the grant. And so, we've stepped back and we said, you know, "How can we do this? How can we support this movement for Early Head Start?" And we looked to our community partners-- not only our community partners through Larimer County Early Childhood Council, but other school districts, community organizations... And we all got together. We incorporated and enlisted the support of all the different areas because, as you know, Early Head Start is a comprehensive program where we enlist multiple agencies. So, we all got together and lo and behold, when we brought all the people to the table, we, we wrote and received the grant. And it was a collaborative effort. It was not only a grant for our Poudre School District, but it was for Larimer County. So, it incorporated other school districts, as well as other areas in our – in our service area. So, it was just enlisting the support. I think that just really helped. And we work in our Early Head Start program across the board. We incorporate all of Larimer County.

Jane: I think another success that we've had-- and this is really around the shared message in our community. And, when we would come together, we're, you know, we're all the usual suspects at the table, folks who are engaged in early childhood, providing services to young children and families. However, we recognize that, you know, some of the folks are not at these meetings who we feel could be sharing and addressing and really hearing the message. And so, with the council acting as our convening organization, and then also with the support of United Way, we developed what we call our Be Ready campaign.

And so, you know, with the intention of wanting to join the families and businesses in the community because we felt like, you know, the message of supporting young children and families is really everybody's business. And so, actually, Trish Stanczyk, who created a 'Be Ready' logo for our Thompson School District Early Childhood Program, let us borrow her work. And so, we adopted 'Be Ready' as our main message. And so with a continued work over – I don't know,

maybe it's been like three years now – we've done things like develop a website, we have 'Be Ready' events in the community. We've created materials that are going out such as brochures, stickers, magnets. And we've even managed to have some city buses with our 'Be Ready' logo on it traveling around town. Corinne: So, one of the things that – as you talked about borrowing... We in Poudre School District...If you don't know the layout, Thompson is the... Thompson School District is right next door. So, we decided to borrow a cup of coffee from our neighbors. And so, we've borrowed – we borrowed some of their 'Be Ready' strategies. And they, you know, they invited us to the fair. We had discussions with them. And so, a lot of the strategies that worked for them, we use at our-- in our Poudre School District Fair which made it very successful. And another thing, as I talked about our Early Head Start program, we have families who are and will be enrolled in the Thompson Preschool Program. So, it was important for us to be able to give them the information so they can attend the Thompson 'Be Ready' Fair as they transition into the preschool program. So, it was really – it was a great collaborative effort.

Jane: Yes.

Bev: I think one of the benefits of collaborations that we've seen in the community is after you work together for a while you start learning from each other so you don't feel like you're always having to reinvent the wheel. So, whether it's the same messages or similar approaches, we kind of learn from each other. And I love... Corinne, you had a great lead in, I think, to talking about a common approach because the reality is in any community, families and children move across boundaries. They don't care, you know, if it's a different program that's serving the other side of the street, they're moving. And so if we're really going to be effective in serving families and children, we know that we need to coordinate it and not only have a similar language, but a similar approach, to how we serve the children and families. And I'm sure many of you in the phone can relate, one of the common themes in our community is, how do we better support children with challenging behaviors? Because they're often the ones that are bouncing from setting to setting and having a really hard time. And we had decided as a community that we wanted to implement a CSEFEL pyramid model across our entire community, so throughout our county, with the goal of change in the culture of how we as a community respond to children with challenging behavior.

Jane: So, with that goal in mind, of wanting to increase social, emotional competency in children, and also to increase the capacity in our community to respond to children with challenging behaviors, we began to design trainings. We've had family events. We have materials that are shared with families and with providers. And, I'd like to mention that the folks attending the trainings were not just the folks that were working in early childhood classrooms, but it also included folks from the Department of Human Services, from our local mental health agency. Let's see, from early intervention, you know, folks that were working across the street, as Bev said, from us. And, you know, parents too were able to take home some tools that they can use when they... After they've attended events that we would plan. And this is interesting, I thought-- just yesterday at our council meeting, Bev shared some data about early childhood providers. And that, over the last three years, we've seen a percent rise in the number of

providers who feel that they are very able to work with children with challenging behaviors. And we felt that was pretty remarkable over a three-year period and also when you consider the kind of turnover that early childhood areas have. I'd like to share a quick story – and that is the other day I was in a classroom and this little boy, who has some challenging behaviors, said to the lunch aide, "When my mom gets mad at me, she tells me what to do." And the lunch aide responded by saying, "That's because your mom wants to keep you safe." So, everybody's learning the language.

Corinne: It's nice, yes.

Wendy: So, you can see how this community engagement work has really impacted the success and the outcomes in Bev, and Jane, and Corinne's work. We're going to shift now and talk a little bit, just briefly, about the importance of goals, strategies, and measuring impact in our work. You'll see the PFCE Framework in front of you. Hopefully, everybody recognizes this graphic. You'll see that we've added the green bars at the top so you can think about how we have our goals and objectives and strategies that really are happening as part of our Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas and then our expected outcomes. And I want you all to know that, you know, we're weaving in community engagement and thinking about how community engagement is part of those goals, objectives, and strategies and the very important contributions it makes toward those expected outcomes, as some of the stories you've already heard illustrate. We took this conversation about community engagement out to the field in the fall of and conducted a number of interviews with programs all across the country.

And we heard three very big common themes that also ties into this for us. And we heard from local programs that having that common goal is what brought people together. It was that shared vision, that shared purpose, shared direction... was really bringing people together for effective community engagement to make progress.

We also heard from people that being very thoughtful and strategic about what you're doing is important and having clear strategy. We heard over and over again from people that the way the work is done and the way progress is made toward expected outcomes is through the relationships that are in place. And, it's through these positive goal-oriented relationships that people were able to come together – leverage everyone's expertise to make progress. And we also heard from programs, over and over again, that what really makes this work worthwhile is, of course, seeing the impact, seeing the results of the work-- both in terms of the opportunities that can come from community engagement for families and children, and the opportunity for families to grow their skills and be leaders and be engaged as well. So, all across this work is the sense of, there's purpose, there's direction, and this results in better community, a stronger place for families and young children.

So, we're going to continue to unpack this topic and shift and look at strength-based attitudes and relationship-based practices. And Mindy May with the National Center is going to guide us

through thinking about these attitudes and practices and how they are strategies that can support this work.

Mindy May: Thank you, Wendy. So, I thought it was great that what we heard from folks like you all that are joining us today about what really it takes to make community engagement happen and be effective so that we can really achieve our outcomes is the relationship, that that was where it all took place, and it was really having those relationships with community partners in place. And so one of the things we know that happens is that relationships, that we often... They aren't always just clean and easy and where we're always in sync with each other. So, there are times that we have challenges that we run into – what you might call a mismatch in a relationship. And so, what we'd like to do is just briefly talk about some of the tools and strategies that at the National Center we have put together for you. And then we're going to actually hear from our panel, from our program, about ways that they have used some of these tools and strategies. So, the first thing to think about is really the attitude and to think about how that... How attitude, which is a frame of mind that we take toward someone, and how that really affects our perspective about the person we're in relationship with.

So, as you can see on this slide, there... And I'm sure many of you, if not all of you have already seen this before, where you can look at this picture and you can see two different things. You might see a young woman, or you might see the old woman. So, it's all about how our perspective and attitudes affect our perspective. And they... And it does affect how we interact with each other. So, I'm going to ask you... So, with the handout that you downloaded, I want to just give you a moment to think about and jot down some ideas and your thoughts about how do the attitudes you embrace affect your relationship with community partners? So, I'm going to give you just a little bit to think about that and jot some notes down.

[Pause]

Mindy: Alright. So, I'm imagining that some of you may have written a couple of different things about how your attitudes impact your interactions and your relationships with your community partners. Some of you might have had to say, "Well, you know, when we'd had real success with a community partner, I really look forward to getting together with that community partner again and thinking about the next thing that we can do together." So, you, you would be approaching that community partner in a very positive, strength-based way. And some of the rest of you might have had some thoughts about, "Well, based on my past experiences with certain community partners, my attitude might be, 'Oh my gosh, do I have to work with them?'" And so just thinking about how that might then impact your ability to be open to working with them and how it might affect your relationship.

So, at the... What we'd like to propose are these strength-based attitudes. So, these are some attitudes that you can take-- and I'm just going to put all four of them up here for you to take a look at... To use as a frame of mind as you get ready to interact with your community partners. And actually you can use this with colleagues, your staff, with your families, all of that to – to,

you know, support your building a positive goal-oriented relationship. So, it's taking a strength-based attitude that then allows you to be operating from a strength-based place. Because the one thing we do know is that whoever we're interacting with, they can perceive what-- how we're coming across. And I know as we've been out across the country talking with you all about relationships, that you know that it's really meeting people where they're at and being authentic and genuine in those relationships. And so people really read where we're coming from. So, we proposed these strength-based attitudes in terms of really allowing us to come from a place where we're going to assume goodwill, good intent, that our community partners have the same goal and the same passion as we do, that they're about wanting to make our community better for families and for children. And that they have some expertise to lend us, some things that we can learn from them. And that we actually can't get to the outcomes that we need to get to... that you saw in the Framework-- without our community partners. So, the attitudes allow us to then have a frame of mind that is going to support us in being positive with our community partners. And so when you think about relationship-based practices, the thing we know is that it's really important that these practices happen on a parallel... In a parallel process.

So, we know that it's critical that we have a culture that says, "We are about being relational," which means it has to be modeled in every relationship we have. So, the kinds of relationships we have with our community partners should also-- would be the same kinds of relationships that we have with our staff. How we are with our staff will impact how staff are with each other, as well as how they are with families. So, if we think about that we're always... Whenever we're in relationship with somebody else – whether it be a family, one of our colleagues, or a community partner – that we're really thinking about how do we... how are we in relationship with them and that we're modeling how we want them to be in relationship with others. Alright? So, we have these five relationship-based practices to support you in thinking about how you can-- concrete ways for you to really build positive goal-oriented relationships with your partners. So, our first one is to reflect on your community partners' perspectives. So, really be thinking about, once again, relationship-building is all about perspective taking. And you all know this. So, we have to understand where people are at, what is important to them, so we can then meet them where they're at and come together with that, as the panel was talking about earlier, with the common vision, the common approach, and the common message. But we first have to understand their perspective. We also want to support competence. So, we know that our community partners have something to offer; they have some expertise. We also know that it – that people need to feel that their expertise and what they have to contribute is valued.

So, we really want to think about ways that we can support their competence. Once again, relationship-building is about perspective taking. So, we really want to reflect on our own perspective. And this is a step we often miss. So, really thinking about what you bring to the interaction. Are there certain... What's your experience, your past experience, your expertise, and possibly some biases that you have, and your value system. Understanding your own perspective first will then get you to a place where you really can reflect and understand your

community partner's perspective. Then we have focus on the family-community partner relationship.

So, really thinking that your community partner that you're working with wants to do, they're there to support families, as well. So, as you think about building relationships with them, you have that in common. Once again, it goes back to the common vision, common approach. And then last, but certainly not least, is to value your community partner's passion and to see any passion that they show. And sometimes that passion comes across in ways that aren't so positive, but to see that as... It's because they care so much about the families that that's why they're having that kind of reaction, that kind of emotion. So, these are some relationship-based practices that we have proposed and that we hope can support you all.

And also they are available, these attitudes and relationship-based practices, are available in a recently released resource that is now available on ECLKC – Building Partnerships through positive goal-Oriented relationships – that is available on ECLKC on the National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement's homepage. So, I am now going to – so now, what we want to do is actually take a poll because I'm sure that many of these practices were things that... Are things that you currently use and employ. But there also may be some ones that you are wondering about. So, we're going to give the opportunity... I see some of you are jumping right in, that's great. So, which of these relationship – relationship-based practices are you wondering about? We're interested in what you're wondering about.

[Pause]

Wendy: So, Mindy, I think we – we have a few more coming in here. It's definitely looking like "focus on the family-community partner relationships" is one that we're all wondering about.

[Pause]

Wendy: So, we'll... Still coming in. I hope everybody is watching the numbers like I am. It's really interesting to see. Yeah, I think we've stabilize. So, as we move forward with our next piece, I hope everybody remembers what ones they checked off as what they're wondering about. And, like I said before when we were watching them come in, it really seems like "focus on the family-community partner relationships" is one that we're all thinking about here. And so, you know, let's move forward and check in on the agenda. You'll see that we've now completed the agenda item of checking on and exploring our strength-based attitudes and relationship-based practices. We're moving into learning about the strategies to navigate challenges.

And so with that poll in mind, which was intended to just get us all thinking about, you know, which ones of these sort of... You're thinking, "Oh, I kind of think I used this and it feels familiar," and which ones, you know, you're wondering about, like we said, and take a moment to – just hang on to your handout because we're going to move into hearing about challenges with our group of – our panel of presenters here. And I want people to maybe even take a marker or a pen and check off the ones that you hear in their stories, in their explanations, as we move

forward. And so now, we're going to have another poll. As we put together this webinar and as we talked to people all over the country in those interviews I have mentioned earlier, we realize that there were some real themes around challenges as well. You all are so smart, you're already doing the poll. We really want you to let us know which one is of more interest. So, we've got Tug of War.

So, what happens when maybe we're not all on the same page. And 'empty chairs.' We heard from people talking about the challenges of getting people to the table and then the challenges of sustaining that and what happens when people stop coming. And then 'herding cats,' which I think give us all an image of, you know, how do you rally and get together and all sort of point in the same direction and coordinate your efforts. So, it looks like the first one that everybody wants to hear about is 'empty chairs. So, I'm going to turn it over to our panel and let them talk a little bit about what their experiences have been with this challenge, some of their stories, and more specifically the strategies that they've used to work with this.

Jane: So, I think I'll start. This is Jane. And I can just tell you about an experience that happened this fall. I prepared an email that I wanted to send out to a large number of our staff. And as a result of that, I was expecting some follow up from several of the people on that mail list. And so, I just waited and was ready to move forward. And then days went by and I didn't get a single response. And so, of course I was thinking, "Oh, they don't like me...they're not listening...they don't really care," all kinds of different things like that. And so I was sort of explaining or describing these feelings to a co-worker and she just came right out and said, "Well, did-- you mean nobody answered the email?" I said, "Nobody." And she said, "Jane, did you send the email?"

And I stopped for a moment and I went back and I checked. I had definitely made a copy of the email and had put it in a file. However, I did forget to click on send. And so nobody received the email. And so, sometimes we have to start with just looking at basics, and that's one example. I hope it doesn't ever happen to you. But, also things, common things like are you thinking about the schedule in terms of people's availability. And that goes for, you know, your families, as well. And how did you message it? Did you message it in a way that was, you know, easily understood and wouldn't require a lot of follow up questions?

Bev: Yeah. I've always loved – I love that story that Jane tells because I think we've all done that sometimes.

Jane: Hopefully not.

Bev: We forget. No, unfortunately, I think we probably all have. I think it's important when you either don't get people to show up at the beginning, or you have a meeting and then they start dwindling off and not coming back, to really engage in some of that self-reflection. And first off, I try to figure out why they're not coming. It might be even meeting with people individually, sending out a poll, getting feedback. But I think some of the questions you want to ask yourself are, do they feel like it's a useful use of their time. Do they understand the purpose? And do

they agree with that purpose? Do they own that purpose too? Back to kind of that shared vision and commitment that we talked about earlier. Are they uncomfortable with the group dynamics? Maybe you have somebody who's dominating all the time or there's some underlying negative currents that are going on and they just think, "I don't want to deal with this and I'm going stop coming." So, I think you got to think about why they're not coming. But then I think there's another level of self-reflection that's important and that's your own self-reflection of... Why in the world are you holding this meeting? I mean we all have lots of meetings. And sometimes we have standing meetings that maybe don't have a really clear purpose to them. And are we really pulling people together and honestly asking their input? Or are you just pulling them together to share information? Are you just pulling them together so that they can rubber stamp a decision you've already made? All of us are really busy and we're going to disengage if we feel like it's not good – not a good use of our time. I think the quality of that process is-it has to be really authentic.

Corinne: And I think you're right. I agree with you. Knowing your audience, but also reflecting on how you're structuring the meeting. We all know that in the world of Head Start that our health advisory board meetings look-- may look different than our Policy Council meeting. So, really know how you're structuring it and know your audience. Have you spent time really planning your meeting? Look at what kind of outcomes you want for each of your agenda items. Really be thoughtful and, you know-- what is the purpose of this agenda item? What do I want to get out? What... How does it benefit the audience and the people that we are working with? And be transparent about your expectations. Does your group know that they have input or, as Bev said, is it just your agenda? Make sure that you are inclusive of all the people at the table. And know that everyone, everyone has a piece of that. And is there really a reason to meet? You know, in this world of meetings, we all know that some of the hardest challenges are just setting a meeting and getting the people to the table. Is that meeting necessary? Or can an email suffice for that? Or how does that look? Or is it a subcommittee or whatever. So, think about the reason why you're having to meet.

Bev: I think this can really be a particular challenge when you have kind of ongoing, routine meetings that might have a purpose for a while. And then it's sort of like you solved that purpose, but you keep meeting because it's a standing committee. And we have that happen to us in our council. We used to have a structure where we had subcommittees-- like a health subcommittee, and an education, and a family engagement subcommittee-- and people weren't coming to those. And so we actually had a conversation at our council meeting and said, "Does this purpose work? Why do we have these meetings?" I think everyone at the table agreed really strongly, let's dump the subcommittee structure and go to an ad hoc committee structure. So, if an issue comes up we need to address, we'll ask over volunteers. They will meet for a limited period of time, you know, work on that issue and then end that committee.

Jane: I can tell you that when I go to meetings I often think I'm going to move away with more work to do. And so that makes you hesitate a little bit about attending all those meetings. And I think one of the things that can be very helpful is that you are getting your work done during the

meeting. So, that you go, you work hard, you leave, and you know you've accomplished something. And I think another thing that helps is when folks who attend the meeting actually see their work – or even their words – being reflected in whatever the finished product might be. I think that's another part of honoring the folks being there and their time. And it's... So that they're not going away having to do more work, on top of yet another meeting.

Corinne: I think people when they feel honored and respected, they're more likely to come back to the table and they're going to put in some honest work because they feel valued.

Bev: Yeah. And I think really the underlying value of that is, are you really being authentic and wanting their input? Are you really doing it because you want input? Or just because you want them to agree to yours? Because if you really wanted their input, that end result should reflect everyone's work.

Jane: Right. And you know when I'm thinking about families or folks who are not used to coming together, another thing that, Corinne, you mentioned at another time-- with just letting people know what the agenda is ahead of time. And, you know, sometimes we have families who really want to be engaged with the community, but they might attend, or try to attend the meeting. And they do not know what folks are talking about. They don't know all the acronyms. And so there's some preparation that can be made with-- and not just parents but other folks who may be new to that setting.

Bev: Right. And the acronym trap is a huge one.

Jane: Yeah.

Bev: If you don't... You got to have the no acronym rule.

Wendy: Wow. So, we've heard everything from checking the basics. So, sometimes the solution is a simple one, like communication or scheduling at a convenient time.

Jane: Click send.

Wendy: Yeah. Jane's laughing about 'click send.' And then you move into the deeper question about whose meeting is this and how authentic is it, and do people really own the work. And I think Jane and Corrine and Bev have really shared some very important questions we can use to triage ourselves in what's happening when we have 'empty chairs.' I want to pass the torch to Mindy May to help us reflect just a little bit about the reflection – the attitudes and the relationship-based practices.

Mindy: Thanks, Wendy. So, I'm sure all of you on the webinar could hear in their ideas about how 'empty chairs' is about getting people to the meeting and participating in the meeting – that you could hear a lot of the attitudes and practices reflected there. And certainly, what came across most strongly, I thought, was the-- that taking the perspective attitude. So, one of the things I heard you all think about was actually using the attitude that the community partner's

contributions are valuable and important and that they have a critical role in helping you achieve your outcomes, and that they deserve the same kind of support and respect that we're asking them to give families. But it was clear that's the kind of attitude you took as you started thinking about your meetings and – which really, actually, led to the practice of-- you kind of got there by reflecting on both your own perspective, as well as your community partners' perspectives. So, really thinking about, you know, the kind of, you know-so not only what's in it for us, as the program who is holding the meeting-- the Head Start or Early Head Start program who is holding the meeting, but what's in it for the community partners? They need to feel like they're getting something out of the meeting as well. You really also worked on supporting competence by allowing-- thinking about how you could get work done in the meetings and let people walk away feeling like, "Okay, that was worth my time and I got something done that's meaningful."

Wendy: Thanks, Mindy. I think we're going to move to a poll. You all get to help guide our agenda for this next one. We've done the 'empty chairs.' So, I would love to hear from all of you who have joined us on the call today as to which one you would like to do next: the Tug of War or the Herding Cats. So, we're watching it come in. It looks like we're at the races. They're running neck to neck. But it does look like 'herding cats' is gaining. We'll give it another moment to let people weigh in who haven't-- may need another second to think about their choice. So, yeah, 'herding cats' is winning, which looks great. While we're waiting for people to cast their vote, I want to remind everybody that we will have time to chat at the end of this webinar. And that will be a great time to ask questions and interact more. So, if you are thinking of questions that you would like to ask our presenters-- or any of the content that you have more questions, please make a note. We will definitely be providing some time at the end, in the last 10 minutes or so where we can chat and answer questions and do some Q&A. So, it looks like the next one that we're going to talk about is 'herding cats.' And so, here we are-- the 'herding cats.' And I'm going to hand it back to our panel.

Corinne: So, this is Corinne. And so, you know, this is... When I think of herding cats, all I can do is reflect on my own household and our cat Tinka and what can get Tinka in the house or what can get her at the table. Well, you know, if we open a can of cat food. And to be honest with you, if the cat food isn't the premium cat food, Tinka's not going to come to the table. She'll take a sniff and then she's outside again and we're back to square one. And when I think of that, I think it's the analogy of how do we get our folks to the table. You have to make it appealing to them, you have to be able to have them invest in the whole project. They have to feel valued. They have to feel respected. So, really if you want to-- it's not just opening that can, it's the substance in the can. So, forgive me for that but...

Bev: I do think it's a great analogy for saying, you have to really have clear expectations. You know, what is the goal going in? Do people understand that? And do people agree with that goal? Because if they don't agree with that goal, they're going to take it sideways. So, I think it has to be a consensus around that goal setting, that gets people to move in the same direction. I also think from my own experience, that planning, planning, planning is incredibly important.

And my general rule of thumb is, I will spend probably twice as much time planning a meeting, as I spend in the meeting. That can seem excessive if you haven't been doing that. But my experience is, when a meeting goes badly and I look back I usually say, "You know, I was busy. I threw together an agenda. I wasn't as intentional about figuring out how to engage people and how to move the agenda forward." It's like I have to learn the lesson again and again, that planning is really, really key. And I think when you're planning, you want to think about how do you-- how are you engaging your partner? So, what's the purpose of the meeting? What's the purpose of the each of the agenda items? And how are you going to actually structure the meeting to get your goals? So, do you need to provide some small group time to ensure that all voices are heard? Because people who are more introverted tend to speak up more in the small groups. And if you're in a large group discussion only, it's going to be dominated by the people who are more comfortable speaking up in that setting. So, you want to think about small group versus large group. You want to think about the table set up. Is it a U-shape? Is it small groups of tables? Is it a big square? You're going to get a different dynamic no matter how you set it up. So, I think being purposeful in that is really important. I also think that we all talk about-- we all know about ground rules.

Everyone sets ground rules. The reality is they're really important. And they're important if you come back to them and use them. If they're just a sign on a wall, it's not going to work. And there are always those standard ground rules about-you know, listen respectfully, and turn off your cell phones, and all the kinds of standard things we know. But in our meetings we've, as a collective-- these ground rules were set by everyone-- we've said there are a couple of things that are super important. And one is that everybody's voice counts. Everyone has a voice at the table. That we are focused on problem solving, so we want to be able to move it forward. And that we really... We want diverse opinions. So, the reality is, in our meetings, it's percent women. We all want to be really agreeable, we all kind of want to work together, not make waves. That's the culture in this industry, I think.

But people do have different opinions. And so we've actually, as a group we agreed that when we have discussions-- everyone sort of nodding their head being really agreeable-- we actually deliberately ask the following question: "What are the other viewpoints that we haven't considered?" And the reason we word it that way is we are deliberately soliciting those opinions and we are depersonalizing it. Because it's sort of saying, any opinions-- it might be yours, it might be somebody else's-- but we need to make sure every opinion is on the table. Because sometimes those things are not spoken if they don't agree-- if they're underlying.

Jane: So, I have a perfect example. I shouldn't be sharing a lot of these examples that seem to go wrong. But that is part of this work-- that you try things and the whole trial and error part. But I had a meeting earlier this year with a fairly large number of people. And a topic came up and there were a few folks who were very comfortable in that setting, in sharing a point of view. And because I didn't ask that question in that way, I didn't get other opinions. And so, again, I made an assumption that everybody felt the same way. And it wasn't until later, when people were

feeling more comfortable to talk about it, that I found that I had assumed wrongly. So, I will be using that question many, many more times in the future.

Corinne: So, there are times when you hear an opposing viewpoint or whatever that is... That's that 'aha' moment. You're like, "Well, I never thought of that." And it really provides opportunities to think outside the box. So, I think those are value – valuable inputs.

Bev: And quite frankly, it's one of the reasons we do collaborative work-- is because everyone has a lot of expertise. And if we don't hear it, then we're not really challenging ourselves to do the best possible job. So, I think we really value it. It's basic. It's a real core value. So, I think sometimes, obviously, in this-- in discussions, you got to get to a decision point to move things forward. And I went to a facilitation training actually amusingly enough called 'herding cats.' That was – and I got this tip and I have loved these cards. I've made this – I make these cards. They're half sized piece of paper – colored paper – and everyone gets a set. And so, when you get to a decision point, you... We... I say, everyone gets a... If you can live with it and support it, move forward, put up the green. If you have some reservations, just feel like you need to talk a little bit more, do the yellow. If you really are against this, use the red. And, what I have found is that its wonderful way to really make sure you hear all voices. Because sometimes people don't speak up, particularly those people who are quieter. But by raising the yellow cards, it's an automatic, "Okay, let's hear your opinion." Where sometimes maybe that person isn't loud enough to cut over somebody else who has dominated the conversation. So, it's really a wonderful way to make sure we do hear those diverse opinions.

Jane: And these cards are so much easier to see than those little thumbs waving around up, down, or sideways.

Bev: Yes. The facilitation is so much easier. It really gets at that temperature of the room and you know that you haven't missed anyone. Jane: And sometimes that thumb is way easy to – to flip back and forth...

Bev: Right.

Jane: ...where I think the cards are more of a commitment to how you really feel.

Bev: Sometimes it can actually make the conversation move faster too because it's a really quick way to do a straw poll. Are we ready to move on? Do we need to spend more time on it? And as opposed to making sure-- it's such a great way to do that. I think the last thing is-- that I'd want to say also is how important relationships are. You know that. You know, people come because they have relationships with people. And it takes a while to build those, but it's really big.

Corinne: It really is big. And we've been working on this relationship for years. It comes, you know, with different pieces too and different parties coming to the table. But it doesn't come quick. If it does come quick, more power to you. So, that's great. But really relationships – as you know, whether it's a relationship in any area take... There are challenges, there are good days,

there are bad days. But this really... Relationship has worked well for us, but it hasn't been without challenges or other areas.

Bev: Yeah. And you know, a humorous thing is that I actually am a relative late-comer. I start about six years ago. And when I came I first said, "20 minutes for networking in this meeting? That doesn't seem really productive." But when I tried to cut back on that, that was a major protest. It's important.

Jane: And we like the feeling of when the meeting was over, we could leave because we had that 20 minutes to make those connections during the meeting. I mean, it was a break, but it was during the scheduled time of the meeting.

Corinne: It's just a great opportunity to touch base with community partners to-- for different government perspective and stuff. So, it's really a great opportunity.

Wendy: So, lots of wonderful strategies. There's a very big theme of planning. There's also a theme about not just relationships, but being very thoughtful and intelligent, intentional, excuse me. Intelligent, too, in how you go about building relationships. And I know that you all were... When we did our poll at the beginning, people were really wondering about focusing on the family-community partner relationship. And I know as we've prepared this webinar and I've worked with Jane, and Corinne, and Bev – all three of them have talked about how they have taken these strategies that they've used in their meetings where there's a lot of agency folks and really turned and incorporated them into their meetings and their work to engage with families in their own individual organizations. And so, there's a real parallel process of-- you know, "Do unto others as you want others to do unto you." And so, by working with these strategies and creating this very strength-based environment-- it's a contagious sort of process. And then people around the table are taking that back to their own organizations and reaching out in their work with families and using a lot of the same positive approach. I want to take a minute with Mindy May to reflect a little bit further about those relationship-based practices and the strength-based attitudes.

Mindy: Thank you, Wendy. And I love how you, you know, tied it back to the practice the people are wondering about, because I actually had noted in this conversation about 'herding cats, that this idea of, you know... At the very beginning, you all were talking about – and Bev I believe it was you – to have the common goal, you know, and really thinking about the common goal and expectations of what this partnership is about. And, you know, I know that you have been talking specifically about what happens in meetings, but really your meetings are representative of your partnerships with people. So, the thing that I saw that happened was in setting that common goal and the common expectations...you did that around your common goal – is about really supporting the families that you all... In your community.

And so, that – so when we think about the relationship-based practice of focus on the family-community partner relationship. It's about thinking so, how can you join. It's a strategy for you to join with your community partner with that common goal and having that be your focus. That

that's what it's about. It's not about who knows more, or who's been doing it longer or, you know, who has what funding. It's really about that we're in this to support families, so how can we best do that together? And then the idea that every voice, you know-- that you have made intentional efforts to make sure every voice gets heard – is really I think – lends itself to valuing your community partner's passion. That relationship-based practice in terms of saying, you know what, we've want to hear what you have to say even if it is not in agreement with ours – in what we're saying – because we know that it's important in moving us forward.

And I thought it was really interesting how you all came to relationship at the end of this conversation, because really what you've done is in your meetings, you have built the relationships through the meeting. So, you're – because of the way you've structured the meetings, because of the way you're thinking about it, because you're saying to community partners, "We want your input. We want you to feel like you're – you have an active role, that you have something to contribute, that we're going to hear what you have to say, and that you're a part of it. That we're in this together. This isn't our – This isn't Head Start's meeting. This is our meeting. This is our community's meeting." So, I am going to hand it back to you, Wendy, so that we can move on to, I think, our final topic.

Wendy: Absolutely. Thanks, Mindy. I do think we have one more challenge to explore. I'm so excited that we have time to do all three. We appreciate everybody helping us sort of stack the priorities in our agenda. We wanted to do all three, but we weren't sure. So, our next topic is 'tug of war.' And I know that this has been a really lively conversation amongst Jane and Corinne and Bev as they've prepared for this. So, I know that they have some real gems to share with us here.

Corinne: Well, when we talked about 'tug of war,' we said, you know, it's-- these conversations are not easy, because you're bringing a variety of personalities and a variety of perspectives and approaches to the table. Going back to what Mindy said was... You know that strength-based and that relationship-based practice, and really valuing those at the table and valuing their opinion. And acknowledging that passion means that they care.

Jane: I think there's a phrase that we use together in our work and it is to 'presume positive intentions.' And that helps you hear people I think when there's-- when there is passion behind what they say.

Bev: Yeah. And so, I think, one of those things… When we know there's going to be a controversial topic, we will actually do a reflective discussion. Actually, we do a reflective discussion at every one of our meetings that we deliberately plan – back to that planning thing – that's going to help elicit, sort of, set the stage well. And so, for an example, when you have a-- when we've have had a controversial topic, we've sometimes done reflective discussions for about 5 to 10 minutes on passion. And so an example…

Jane: Yeah. And, Bev, I just... You just straight... I just learned from you that that is very intentionally planned before certain conversations that you pick up those reflective questions,

so that people are really geared up and they have in their mind already a more positive approach. So, here's an example of one meeting, where we were going to discuss something that could be very passionate for people. And so, we were filling out a sheet of paper with these questions and then we would converse with our partner next-- somebody sitting next to us. So, this is what... An example. "Recall a time when someone else's passion created challenges for you. How might showing that you valued the person's passion impact your interaction with them?" And then, here's another one. "Consider times when your own passion... When your own passion was the wind beneath your wings? And/or when your passion was the storm that threatened to sink the ship? How did the extent to which your passion was valued impact you?"

Bev: It's amazing what comes out in that conversation and how it actually changes what happens afterwards. Because people sort of stop and think, "Oh, that's reflective of what the person's thinking or I'm thinking." And it takes away, it takes the edge off the controversial part of passion. So... But I have to say, I'm going to share an example that we don't always get it right. You know, this is tough stuff.

And we actually, our reflective discussion at our council meeting yesterday was about trial and error. And I think-- I'm going to share an example of how we didn't get it right once in our community and how we learned from that. And that was an example of-- a couple of years ago, one of our school districts said that they wanted-- decided they wanted to add tuition-based preschool slots because they were getting parent requests for it and they wanted to ensure that the classrooms included typically-developing peers. They'd had a lot of internal discussions about this. And then they came and announced it to all of their partners at the council meeting as a done deal. That didn't go over really well. And there are a lot of community providers that got pretty upset because they were-- and angry, because of the perceived competition. So, it gave us a chance to say, "How are we going to deal with this?"

And the school district was incredibly great about saying, "Okay, we need to step back and say, "We didn't go right. So, what are we going to do moving forward and how do we correct this?" And so they actually turned to the council at that point as a more neutral party, because everyone was already mad at them. And so, they-- and we helped them create a taskforce. But they drove the process and what... we helped select the taskforce that included families, it included providers-- that were going to work with them through the pilot phase of two years. And we helped-- and we got a neutral facilitator, because that's often really important when you have a controversial topic. And the results are that it was sort of a great continuous learning. There were things that changed. There were attitudes changed. The passions calmed down. People got it and moved forward, and it really ended up in a pretty good place. The second half of the story is then another school district said, "Okay, we want to do that too." But they said, "Okay, we learned." See that trial and error. "We learned from our neighbor." And so this time, we're thinking about doing it.

So, we're going to go to all the community partners and talk to them ahead of time. And sort of say, "This is what we're talking about doing. Tell us what are your concerns are. Let's address

them together." And boy, did that go a lot more smoothly. So, I think we've all had those experiences. It's just-- you kind of-- if it goes wrong, you step back and say, "What do you do to fix it?" And let's try to figure out a better process and you talk to people about what they need to move forward. So, it, it works, but it's not always easy.

Jane: You know, if we got into this, I'd like to add something that just kind of came to mind. When we were-- when folks were initially putting in areas that they were wondering about and about the family and the community relationships, and you know, most of us, I think, have heard how some of the families that we work with have, you know, maybe burned bridges with other agencies when they've gone to look for some help. And so, I was just reflecting over these attitudes and practices and just thinking about how we can really infuse some of that into our conversations with families, or when maybe we're coaching them, to think about how they might better interact with those community agencies that can provide them support.

And so, you know, these aren't just skills for us to be using. But in addition to modeling how that works for families, I think having really specific conversations about some of those practices or attitudes would be so helpful. You know, I'm sure we know how our families walk into a situation and they're upset, and they-- they're desperate. Or their past experience hasn't been positive, and so all that they bring in. And often, with that what happens is those kind of negative interactions with community agencies. And so, it blocks the potential of an agency being helpful to a family. And it also-- it creates an attitude of the family saying, "Well, that didn't help, but I'm never going back. Or I'm not going to see anybody because I never get what I need." So, I don't know, that just came up while you were talking about that.

Corinne: It kind of reflects on-- I'm sorry. It reflects back on what Mindy was saying about those relationship-based practices. You know, this will work for community and programs, for programs and staff, for staff to staff, and staff to families. This is some-- this is-- these are tools that we can all use to help us move forward.

Wendy: So, I am looking at the notes that have been happening while our panel has been talking and I'm truly in awe at the amazing number of ideas and strategies that have come from our conversation throughout this. Including thinking about how we can use how we are with each other to support how others are with others, whether that's community partners with families or families with community agencies, however that works. We've got just a little bit more time left. I want to remind everybody that on your handout, right underneath the strength-based attitudes and the relationship-based practices, is space for you to write down strategies you plan to use. I want to encourage you to think for a minute about which ones you would like to take out for a test drive and use in your work as we move forward. So, we're going to be wrapping up with following the threads here and really thinking about how we started this conversation looking at the successes.

So, that end in mind-- what's the impact that we want-- the progress we want to make toward outcomes. Then, our panel has really shared with us some really specific examples of how

they've not only talked about having a shared of vision and a shared goal, but they've really cultivated that, so that everybody across their community really owns it and feels like their voice is being heard and it's authentic. They've talked about many different strategies, from the cards with the different colors that Bev talked about, to getting back to the basics of sometimes the-- sometimes we make things harder than it needs to be and it's something simple, to listening to Corinne talk about how it took engaging the whole community to really achieve their goal of bringing Early Head Start into the community. And so, you can see how it's all tying together. I'd like to give Bev and Jane and Corinne a minute or two to just add any final thoughts they have. Then we will move on to next steps and have a chance and chat for all of us to talk about some of the ideas we've heard.

Bev: So, I'll jump in here first. And I think… I'd just like to say be kind to yourself. You know, I think sometimes when you listen to people talk about what they do in the communities you think, "Oh, I'm not there." But the reality is, we've been doing this for 15 years. Not 15 minutes, 15 days. It takes a long time and there are ups and downs in it. So, be kind to yourself. And also, think very deliberately about the skills that you might want to develop because facilitation is a unique skill. And it's not something that-- in the early childhood profession-- it's not something that we teach or think about in terms of professional development. We tend to go to big classes in early childhood. And so, I think, going out and seeking out that as a professional development goal, to get that-- get a little bit more comfortable running groups, being in that neutral role, figuring out how to help all voices get heard, could be really useful.

Corinne: And one thing I'd like to say is that we are really fortunate here in Larimer County. We have great resources. We have the Early Childhood Council. We have great partnership with our fellow districts. You may not have that same relationship and that's okay. Think outside the box. What community partners can you bring in to help support that vision of moving forward, that passion? And really, when you think outside the box, you-- you know, we have our health department, we have our social services that will come to the table. What other agencies will come out that you can think of that might really support you that you haven't thought about? So, really think about that and build those relationships.

Jane: I just want to add to what Corinne just said. It reminds me of the song, "Love the Ones You're With" or "The One You're With." But in our case, you do need to take advantage of whoever is available to you or could become available to you. And I think the big picture here is that, you know, we say over and over again that the success of our children and families really takes the community. And so, whatever your community looks like, engage those folks with that common goal. Love them. They're the one you're with.

Bev: That's right.

Corinne: Very good.

Wendy: So, we are now at our last step of our agenda, which is thinking together about our next steps. You'll see in your handouts, you do have that last place where you have an opportunity to

really think about your own next steps. I am going to hand this to Mindy May to offer a few final thoughts and some support around those next steps.

Mindy: Thank you, Wendy. So, as Wendy mentioned… So on your handout, you have a place… And if you haven't had a chance already, you might want to go ahead and jot down the strategies you would like to try, or maybe even get more effective at because I'm sure that many of these strategies are strategies that you recognize and are using, as well. And then we want you to… So, one of the things we know is that to put an idea into action, it really takes us committing to doing-- to taking the next step. So, that's why we've really, we want you – you've chosen to spend this hour and a half of your time here on this webinar to get some ideas to support you and your community engagement efforts. And so we really want you to be able to, and we heard you from our previous webinars saying, you know, you really want some takeaways that you can say, "Okay, I'm going to take this and now I'm going to go do something with it." So, we want to give you just a minute to think about-- so if this is what you want to try, what are you going to do next? How are you going to make sure that you try that out? So, we're going to give you just a few seconds to jot down what you plan to do next.

[Pause]

Mindy: Okay. So, hopefully you will continue that process if you weren't... if you didn't get it completed in those few seconds. But we just wanted to get you started so that you'll walk away and say, "Okay, this is what I'm going to take away and go do." But I also wanted to remind you that you can get a document about... I'm sorry, a resource about these practices and attitudes on the National Center for Parent, Family, and Community Engagement web, webpage where you can find the document on building partnerships' with families, building positive goal-oriented relationships. And these practices and attitudes that are related to working with partners and working with staff are actually in the section on Reflective Practice and Reflective Supervision. So, you can find--you can have more information and it gives you some more definitions and ideas there. So, please take advantage of that. That's a newly released resource for us. So, and now, it's time for you --for your opportunity to network with each other. So, I loved how --at the Larimer County Early Childhood Council, they have a networking time built in. And so that's one of the things we've heard from you all, is that you like, on these webinars, the opportunity to network with each other. So, I'm going turn it back over to Wendy so she can explain what your different options are.

Wendy: Thanks, Mindy. So, while we're getting the chat set up, I want to offer a couple reminders for everybody. Some of the resources are in the additional resources pod. So, if you want to download the handout and have more copies of that, you can. We also have a handout version of the slides from this presentation. So, if you want those, those are in that additional resources box. And then the Building Partnerships and Relationships with Families resource that Mindy has been talking about, is available for you in additional resources box as well. So, you can highlight those and click download if you'd like to download it right now. As we end our, come to our last 15 minutes or so of the webinar, we want to offer you three different chat

opportunities. So, you're going to see in the upper left hand corner, we have a water cooler chat. We know that when we have these webinars people across the country really enjoy giving the shout out to everybody else and saying hello. So, that's a great place to say hi to people and connect. Right below that is 'colleague conversations.' So, this is a place to share some of the things you're thinking about with community engagement with each other. I want to really put a plug in here to share some of those next steps that you're going to use. I know that if you write it down and you share it, there's a better chance of actually moving forward with implementation. I want to encourage people to do that. And then the presenter chat area, if you have questions or comments for our presenters today, you can put those there and they'll be joining you in that chat area and responding as best as they can as questions come in. We really appreciate everybody joining us on this webinar. As you leave our webinar, please know that you're going to have a survey pop up. We really appreciate your input and your feedback that continuously supports our improvement process. You will also get a follow-up email with another opportunity to give us feedback via a survey link. Again, we really value that input and we use it to continuously improve our offerings. I know that sometimes people ask about certificates. You will get a thank you message from us by email after you leave the webinar. We encourage you to print out that message as your documentation and verification that you attended the webinar.

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